A Holistic Approach to Optimizing Care Communications Across a Large Health System

At Integris Health, the largest health system in Oklahoma, a coordinated and holistic approach to optimizing care communications helped improve workflows, reduce patient safety concerns, and significantly raise patient and staff satisfaction.

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Introduction

In the acute care environment, every second matters. To ensure that patients get the most effective, efficient care for their unique needs, caregivers must know exactly where they need to be at every moment.

Technology has become increasingly vital for supporting the seamless flow of staff, supplies, and services across a busy hospital. Digital communication systems, such as nurse call systems and real-time locating solutions, are now essential for enabling coordinated, comprehensive care whenever and wherever it's needed.

While every health system has a nurse call system, most healthcare organizations have untapped opportunities to modernize their clinical care communications networks to meet rising demands from patients and staff members.

Fortunately, maximizing the potential of a clinical communications system doesn't have to mean a total rip-and-replace. Instead, organizations can augment their existing tools with nurse-friendly automation features to improve response times and reduce unwanted variation in workflows, helping increase caregiver satisfaction.

Integris Health, the largest health system in Oklahoma, did exactly that with VOALTE Nurse Call and an integrated Real-Time Locating solution, a unified platform for clinical communications. With more than 10,000 caregivers across 18 hospitals, Integris Health's holistic, proactive approach to digital communications improves patient safety and satisfaction while helping make caregiver workflows easier.

Identifying Clinical Goals and the Right Technology Solutions

Integris Health has been dedicated to delivering safe, high-quality care in Oklahoma for more than 100 years. To build on this legacy and continue to execute its mission to create positive experiences and outcomes, the health system began modernizing its clinical communications tools. Jennifer Jones, Chief Nursing Informatics Office (CNIO) at Integris led this effort.

"Like most health systems, we've experienced many challenges during the past few years," explains Jones. "Between the rise of consumerism, the shortages of qualified providers, and the incredible stress of COVID-19, we know that we need to continuously improve our operations to deliver the best possible care for our communities."

For Jones and her team, this started by leveraging underused capabilities in their current technology. "Specifically," Jones explains, "We identified some promising opportunities to modernize our nurse call and locating systems, and we began an effort to better understand how we could use our tools to further our digital transformation."

Leadership and clinical champions collaborated with Baxter to establish shared goals and create a roadmap for reaching them. Some of the objectives included improving consistency across care sites, addressing cognitive burden and alarm fatigue for care teams, and addressing workplace violence for nurses.

Lack of Standardization

One of the main objectives, Jones explains, was to improve consistency in the nurse call configurations across units: "Different facilities – or even different departments in the same facility – had their own way of using call lights, which made it very hard to work efficiently in a new environment and generate meaningful reports for leadership. Standardization became a top goal for this project."

The baseline assessment and planning described in the next section was critical to understanding what aspects of the nurse call system to standardize. Jones's team of expert stakeholders at Integris carefully struck a balance of simplifying light and tone configurations without disregarding unique needs of specific care units. When they were finished, they had standards that were much more transferrable for any Integris nurse moving between care units.

Alarm Fatigue/Reducing

Jones and her team also recognized great opportunity to decrease the alarm fatigue and the overall mental burden that their care teams were taking on. "There was simply too much noise that wasn't conveying actionable information," complained Jones, "So it wasn't helping our caregivers and it wasn't a very peaceful environment for our patients to rest and heal." Integris was eager to learn of concrete ways to utilize their nurse call and locating system to simplify workflows for caregivers, take some of the pressure off them, and hopefully improve the overall patient experience in the process.

Specifically, Integris activated automated rounding reminders within VOALTE Nurse Call. Once a caregiver who is wearing a real-time locating staff badge enters and exits a patient's room within the appropriate time frame, the badge location triggers the rounding timer to reset within nurse call. Caregivers are reminded via nurse call lights outside a patient's room when another round is due, and the completion of the round is automatically recorded within nurse call reporting.

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> *– Jennifer Jones,*
> *VP of Clinical Applications and Informatics at Integris Health*

Workplace Violence

Caregiver workplace violence is on the rise, and unfortunately staff at Integris Health are no exception to this alarmingly fast-growing trend. According to one study in the Journal of Emergency Nursing, 76% of nurses experience incidences of workplace violence[1], but sadly, according to the American Nurses Association, less than 60% of incidences actually get reported[2]. Therefore, the phenomenon is likely even larger than what official numbers would suggest. For Jones and her team at Integris, finding ways to keep their care teams safe was paramount.

Thus, Integris took a deeper look into their staff duress alerts that can activate with the push of a button on the caregiver's real-time locating badge. The button triggers special call lights and alerts other caregivers to respond to the person in need at their exact location. Not only does this give Integris nurses an added sense of security, it also allows clinical leadership to keep tabs on trends of how often the alert is used. Then, they can make decisions to improve the safety of the environment in the long-run.

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[1] Speroni, et al. Incidence and Cost of Nurse Workplace Violence Perpetrated by Hospital Patients or Patient Visitors. Journal of Emergency Nursing. 2014:40(3)218-2. 228.

[2] American Nurses Association. Issue Brief: Reporting Incidents of Workplace Violence. 2019.

Implementing Change and Generating Buy-in from Staff

With clearly established goals and specific technology changes to implement, Integris Health began rolling out a combination of technology and process improvements across its pilot sites. The team chose two units to serve as pilot sites to drive standardization and decision-making for the system.

BEST PRACTICES FOR ENSURING ADOPTION AND ONGOING COMPLIANCE

Baseline assessment and planning: Collaborate across the organization to make sure that new tools and processes meet the needs of different caregivers in all settings.

Implementation: Engage champions of change to offer peer-to-peer education and facilitate conversations with leadership.

Continuous improvement: Monitor adherence over time to highlight gaps in adoption or pain points that may require additional changes or training.

On setting a baseline and planning, Jones emphasizes the importance of methodically planning with the expert stakeholders at your facility who know it best. "I think you have to have a clear understanding of the clinical workflows that you have today to know what's working well and then know what's not working well in those spaces," Jones states. "Start by bringing in key stakeholders to help inform your roadmap, including your frontline staff and your vendors."

The Integris CNIO gives a specific example of not knowing the full potential of their nurse call and locating system until they had the right people at the table. "We didn't really understand how much data we could get from our nurse call system before talking with our vendor. And our nurses didn't fully see how standardizing reporting could give them more tools to improve their productivity. Once we began to work collaboratively, we started to see that there was so much we could achieve together to make life better for everyone."

But knowing what to changes to make was only part of the battle. For Jones, arguably the more important step is ensuring a laser-focused implementation process. "Making changes isn't easy, even when everyone is aligned with the ultimate goals," acknowledged Jones. "To succeed, you need to be very thoughtful about your rollout and spend extra time on educating, engaging, and supporting staff throughout the implementation period."

Jones's team went the extra mile in the training process, creating a simulated caregiver area complete with a regular bed where they brought in Hillrom to help with training on the new nurse call features. Integris Health also leveraged its online learning management system to provide on-demand training to clinicians whenever they had a moment to complete a module.

Implementing Change cont.

Skimping on training or trying to speed through the initial familiarization period is a mistake that too many health systems make, Jones cautions. "Previously, we've adopted technology and minimized our training. We know that ultimately impacts our adoption, so we were very methodical with required training and participation."

With an involved process like this, moving quickly simply wasn't possible. "Across this entire process," Jones recalls, "We embraced the philosophy of 'going slow to go fast,' so that we can make sure everyone gets their questions answered and we can minimize the anxiety and potential pushback of a sudden change."

Finally, now that the new technology is thoroughly implemented across the pilot sites, Integris has moved into a continuous improvement phase, constantly monitoring the standardizations and technological changes and continuing to tweak to drive at their clinical goals.
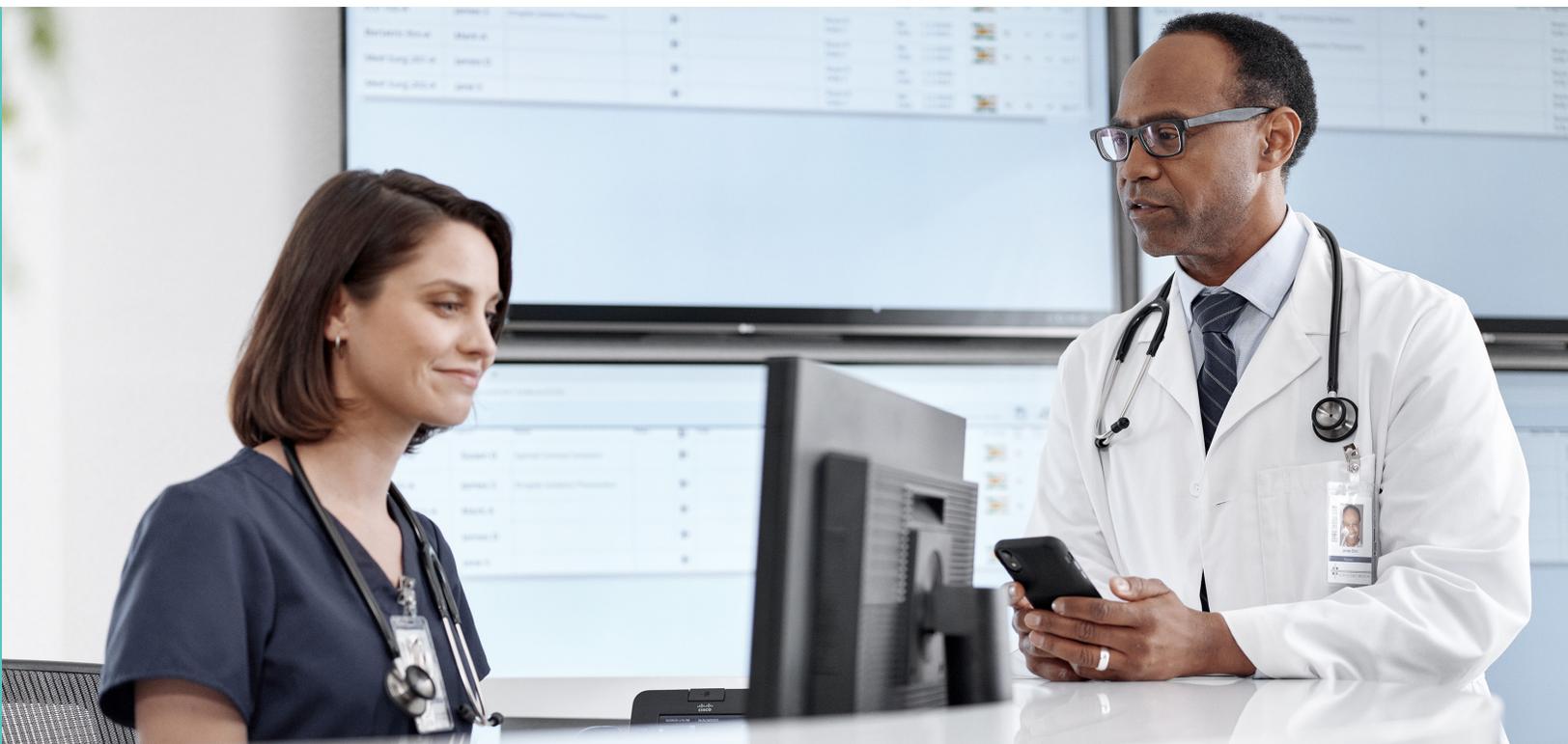
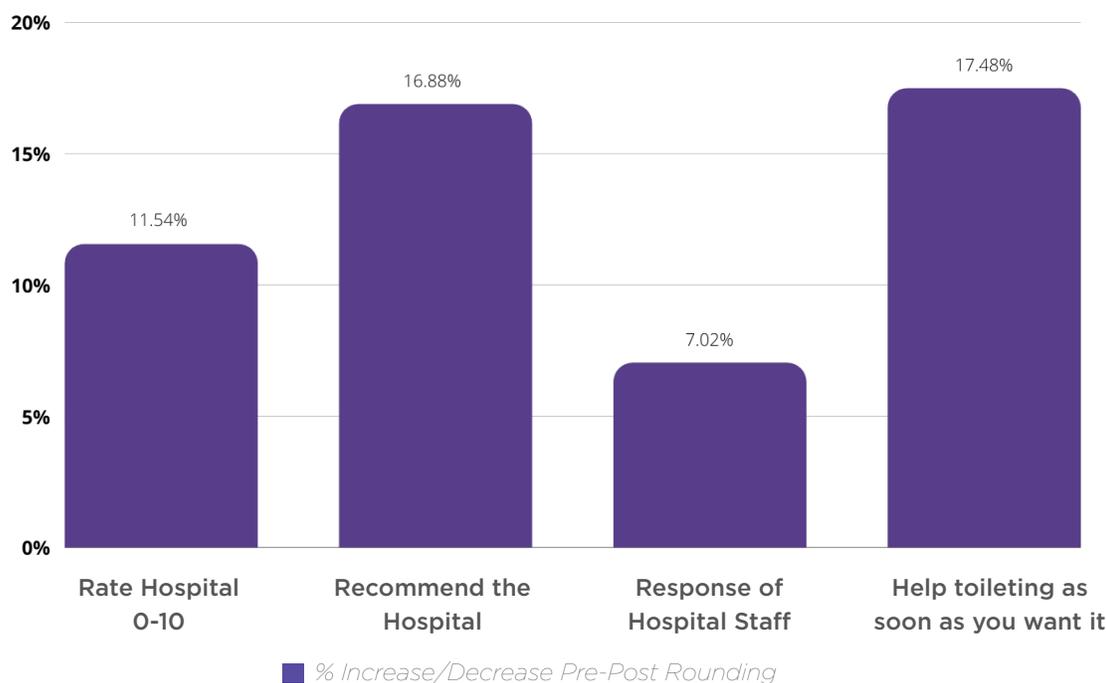# Generating Measurable Results Across the Health System

Integris Health's successful approach to implementing new workflows and technologies has brought positive results to patients and providers alike.

Rounding compliance improved overall on the targeted units, hovering around the 90 percent goal for the health system at one of the primary pilot sites. This means 9 out of every 10 times, patient rooms are rounded on a least once an hour.

The unit saw notable improvements on its patient satisfaction scores, including an 11.5 percent increase in the overall rating of the hospital, and 16.7 percent increase in likelihood of recommending the hospital to others, and a 7 percent improvement on ratings of staff responsiveness.

Press Ganey 6 East

% Increase/Decrease - Pre-Post Automated Rounding 6 East

Bar chart showing: Rate Hospital 0-10: 11.54%; Recommend the Hospital: 16.88%; Response of Hospital Staff: 7.02%; Help toileting as soon as you want it: 17.48%

■ *% Increase/Decrease Pre-Post Rounding*

In another pilot site, a combination of the optimized Voalte Nurse Call System, Hillrom smart beds, and fall prevention solutions resulted in zero patient falls for seven months.

"A collaborative, measured, and holistic approach to change is really at the center of our success," said Jones. "We took our time to carefully plan out our strategy and work with staff to get them used to the changes, so we were able to minimize pushback and maximize outcomes."

In Conclusion

Modernizing and optimizing a clinical care communications system requires detailed planning, proactive staff education, and a collaborative approach to implementation.

Jones suggests that health systems take the time to bring multiple stakeholders to the table and foster open discussion about what's possible given the skills and resources at hand.

"Having clinical informatics, IT, clinical nurses and clinical leaders involved in discussions about the clinical workflow is key to nurturing close partnerships," she stressed. "It's not just the bedside caregivers; it's not just IT. It's everybody understanding the clinical workflows, understanding the alarm fatigue, the stress with whatever technology that you're trying to improve. It really takes beings there to understand how you can leverage that technology so you can help augment your clinicians at the bedside. It takes a village."

While Integris Health has seen impressive success so far, they aren't done yet. There is more that their digital communications system can do, and the organization is eager to make additional improvements to support high-quality patient care.

"I think we're just going to keep finding new opportunities for investment in our care communication technologies and working as much as we can to be very efficient for our clinicians. Our ultimate goal is to enhance the patient and caregiver experience, and we're excited to keep pushing toward that objective in new and innovative ways." If this first project is any indication, the team at Integris Health is poised to do just that.

Upcoming Event

Optimal workflows: Standardizing care communications improves outcomes

Learn more during our webinar with Integris Health System's Jennifer Jones, VP of Clinical Applications and Informatics as she walks through her team's unique process of rolling out its nurse call and staff locating system configurations to multiple facilities, overcoming the inherent obstacles, and ultimately how it helped Integris caregivers and patients by optimizing the technology they already owned.

Learn more

About Baxter

Uniting to Save and Sustain Lives. **Baxter and Hillrom** are uniting to meet the challenges of a rapidly evolving healthcare landscape. Together, we are focused on transforming healthcare with bold innovations that will help realize a shared promise to improve care for all.

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